

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
BEAUMONT DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VS.

COLUMBUS BENTLEY

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CASE NO. 1:12-CR-30(3)

**FINDINGS OF FACT AND RECOMMENDATION ON GUILTY PLEA**  
**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE**

By order of the District Court, this matter is referred to the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge for administration of the guilty plea under Rule 11. Magistrate judges have the statutory authority to conduct a felony guilty plea proceeding as an “additional duty” pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(3). United States v. Bolivar-Munoz, 313 F.3d 253, 255 (5th Cir. 2002).

On January 11, 2013, this case came before the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge for entry of a guilty plea by the Defendant, Columbus Bentley, to Count Two of the Indictment. Count Two of the Indictment alleges that from on or about March 4, 2005 to on or about March 20, 2011, in the Eastern District of Texas and elsewhere, the Defendant did knowingly, willfully, and unlawfully conspire, combine, confederate, and agree with others known and unknown to the Grand Jury, to commit offenses against the United States, that is, to conduct and attempt to conduct financial transactions affecting interstate and foreign commerce, which involved the proceeds of a specified unlawful activity, to wit: conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five (5) kilograms or more of a Schedule II controlled substance, namely cocaine HCL, in violation of

21 U.S.C. § 846, knowing that the property involved represented the proceeds of some form of unlawful activity, with the intent to conceal and disguise the nature, source, or ownership of such proceeds, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(a)(1)(B)(I), said financial transactions being the receiving of or attempting to receive and the delivery or attempted delivery of a bulk money shipment of United States currency received from purchasers of cocaine HCL provided by the Hobbs drug trafficking organization for the purpose of delivery to co-conspirators in the Southern District of Texas via transportation of the tainted proceeds through the Eastern District of Texas, all in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h).

The Defendant, Columbus Bentley, entered a plea of guilty to Count Two of the Indictment into the record at the hearing. After conducting the proceeding in the form and manner prescribed by Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11, the undersigned finds:

a. That the Defendant, after consultation with his attorney, has knowingly, freely and voluntarily consented to the administration of the guilty plea in this case by a United States Magistrate Judge in the Eastern District of Texas subject to a final approval and imposition of sentence by the District Court.

b. That Defendant and the Government have entered into a plea agreement which was disclosed and addressed in open court, entered into the record, and placed under seal. The Defendant verified that he understood the terms of the plea agreement, agreed to the Government's summary of the plea agreement, and acknowledged that it was his signature on the plea agreement. To the extent the plea agreement contains recommendations and requests pursuant to FED. R. CRIM. P. 11 (c)(1)(B), the court advised the Defendant that he has no right to withdraw the plea if the Court does not follow the particular recommendations or requests. To the extent that any or all of the terms of

the plea agreement are pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A) or (C), the undersigned advised the Defendant that he will have the opportunity to withdraw his plea of guilty should the Court not follow those particular terms of the plea agreement.<sup>1</sup>

c. That the Defendant is fully competent and capable of entering an informed plea, that the Defendant is aware of the nature of the charges and the consequences of the plea, and that the plea of guilty is made freely, knowingly, and voluntarily. Upon addressing the Defendant personally in open court, the undersigned determines that the Defendant's plea is knowing and voluntary and did not result from force, threats or promises (other than the promises set forth in the plea agreement). See FED. R. CRIM. P. 11(b)(2).

d. That the Defendant's knowing and voluntary plea is supported by an independent factual basis establishing each of the essential elements of the offense and the Defendant realizes that his conduct falls within the definition of the crimes charged under 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h).

### **STATEMENT OF REASONS**

As factual support for the Defendant's guilty plea, the Government presented a factual basis. See Factual Basis and Stipulation. In support, the Government would prove that Columbus Bentley, is one and the same person charged in the Indictment and that the events described in the Indictment

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<sup>1</sup>“(3) Judicial Consideration of a Plea Agreement.

(A) To the extent the plea agreement is of the type specified in Rule 11(c)(1)(A) or (C), the court may accept the agreement, reject it, or defer a decision until the court has reviewed the presentence report.

(B) To the extent the plea agreement is of the type specified in Rule 11(c)(1)(B), the court must advise the defendant that the defendant has no right to withdraw the plea if the court does not follow the recommendation or request.

(4) Accepting a Plea Agreement. If the court accepts the plea agreement, it must inform the defendant that to the extent the plea agreement is of the type specified in Rule 11(c)(1)(A) or (C), the agreed disposition will be included in the judgment.

(5) Rejecting a Plea Agreement. If the court rejects a plea agreement containing provisions of the type specified in Rule 11(c)(1)(A) or (C), the court must do the following on the record and in open court (or, for good cause, in camera):

(A) inform the parties that the court rejects the plea agreement;

(B) advise the defendant personally that the court is not required to follow the plea agreement and give the defendant an opportunity to withdraw the plea; and

(C) advise the defendant personally that if the plea is not withdrawn, the court may dispose of the case less favorably toward the defendant than the plea agreement contemplated.” FED. R. CRIM. P. 11(c)(3)-(5).

occurred in the Eastern District of Texas and elsewhere. The Government would also have proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, each and every essential element of the offense as alleged in Count Two of the Indictment through the testimony of witnesses, including expert witnesses, and admissible exhibits. In support of the Defendant's plea, the undersigned incorporates the proffer of evidence described in detail in the factual basis and stipulation, and the representations made by counsel for the Government at the hearing.

The Defendant, Columbus Bentley, agreed with and stipulated to the evidence presented in the factual basis and agreed to the Government's proffer. Counsel for the Defendant and the Government attested to the Defendant's competency and capability to enter an informed plea of guilty. The Defendant agreed with the evidence presented by the Government and personally testified that he was entering his guilty plea knowingly, freely and voluntarily.

#### **RECOMMENDED DISPOSITION**

**IT IS THEREFORE** the recommendation of the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge that the District Court accept the Guilty Plea of the Defendant which the undersigned determines to be supported by an independent factual basis establishing each of the essential elements of the offense charged in Count Two of the Indictment. Accordingly, it is further recommended that the Defendant, Columbus Bentley, be finally adjudged guilty of the charged offense under Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(h), and the District Court should accept the plea agreement.

The Defendant is ordered to report to the United States Probation Department for the preparation of a presentence report. The Defendant has the right to allocute before the District Court before imposition of sentence.

## **OBJECTIONS**

Objections to this report must be: (1) specific, (2) in writing, and (3) served and filed within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy of this report. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(b) and 72(b). A party's failure to object bars that party from: (1) entitlement to de novo review by a district judge of proposed findings and recommendations, see Rodriguez v. Bowen, 857 F.2d 275, 276-77 (5th Cir. 1988), and (2) appellate review, except on grounds of plain error of unobjected-to factual findings and legal conclusions accepted by the district court, see Douglass v. United Servs. Auto. Ass'n., 79 F.3d 1415, 1417 (5th Cir. 1996) (en banc). The constitutional safeguards afforded by Congress and the courts require that, when a party takes advantage of his right to object to a magistrate's findings or recommendation, a district judge must exercise its nondelegable authority by considering the actual evidence and not merely by reviewing and blindly adopting the magistrate's report and recommendation. See Hernandez v. Estelle, 711 F.2d 619, 620 (5th Cir. 1983); United States v. Elsoffer, 644 F.2d 357, 359 (5th Cir. 1981) (per curiam).

SIGNED this 11th day of January, 2013.

  
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Zack Hawthorn  
United States Magistrate Judge